United Nations A/57/PV.38

General Assembly

Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

38th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 30 October 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 52

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/387 and Corr.1)

The President: I now give the floor to the Secretary-General to present his report, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change".

The Secretary-General: I am grateful for this opportunity to present my report, "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change".

As this Assembly well knows, one of my chief aims ever since I became Secretary-General has been to make the United Nations more useful to its Member States and to the peoples of the world by making it more effective and efficient. I have consistently said that, in order to do this, we must be prepared to change with the times, constantly adjusting to new conditions and new needs.

That was the object of the reform report that I introduced in my first year and of other initiatives I have taken since then. It is equally the aim of this new report. The report sets out a package of very pragmatic improvements. It builds on all that we have achieved together in the past five years. And it is guided by what the Member States have decided should be the Organization's priorities.

I am proposing a thorough review of our programme of work to make sure we are concentrating our efforts on what matters to Member States and to the peoples of the world. The Millennium Declaration, along with the outcomes of the International Conference on Financing for Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and other major conferences of the past decade, have outlined a comprehensive vision of what Member States seek to accomplish. We must now ensure that our programme of work is adjusted and aligned to support this ambitious agenda — especially the Millennium Development Goals and other imperatives in the economic and social areas. Our goals will not be met unless we put all our efforts behind them.

In response to specific requests made by this Assembly, the report contains a number of proposals for improving our performance in the areas of human rights and public information. Some have suggested that the attention given to these two areas implies a downgrading of the priority given to development. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have looked at human rights and public information in response to Members' specific requests and the report is driven by our overriding ambition and mission to meet the development goals set for the world's people.

Also, in response to the Assembly's request, the report identifies major improvements in the planning and servicing of meetings, including a more integrated approach and greater use of information technology.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

02-66750 (E)

I have put forward a variety of ideas for improving the reports that the Secretariat prepares. This is not simply a question of reducing the number and length of reports, although that certainly is necessary. It is also a question of strengthening their quality to permit a more comprehensive and holistic consideration of complex, interconnected issues with which we must grapple. This is particularly relevant for the consideration of economic and social issues. The Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and subsidiary organs need high-quality analysis based on rigorous research and thematic coherence. Better reporting will help enhance the Organization's development voice and strengthen the role of the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in leading the international agenda in this area.

The report also identifies further steps required to reinforce coordination among United Nations entities, particularly in the delivery of programmes at the country level. We are all better off when the United Nations works well as a team.

The report proposes some important changes in our budget and planning system. At the moment, we have three different processes covering different time scales, and there are three different oversight review mechanisms. This is unnecessarily complex and labour-intensive, and makes it nearly impossible for the vast majority of Member States to participate meaningfully in the deliberations of this Assembly.

I am establishing a high-level panel to take stock of the relationship between the United Nations and civil society. The intensity of this interaction has grown tremendously in the past 15 years or so. Much good has come from these contacts. At the same time, some real challenges have come to the fore, and we can all sense that it may well be time to look closely at what is working well and what is not. The panel will be composed of people from different backgrounds — Governments, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, parliaments and so on — as well as from different regions of the world, and will suggest ways to enhance this crucial relationship.

Finally, the report contains proposals aimed at making life better and more rewarding for our staff, as well as further improving their quality and performance, notably by making it easier for them to move between locations, between functions and between organizations.

This report provides broad direction for the future. It sets goals and provides an indication of how to reach those goals. The whole package hangs together as a coherent whole, and I urge the Assembly to treat it as such. What I need to know now is whether the Assembly agrees with the broad direction. I hope we can all agree that the programme of work needs to be updated; that reports can better serve the membership's difficult policy-making decisions; and that the system of planning and budgeting needs to be simplified. And I hope that once the Assembly debates the report in plenary meeting, it will adopt a single resolution giving me clear guidance on the way forward.

My proposals may seem modest, taken individually. But taken together, they amount to a new way of doing business. Most important, they are achievable steps, with real potential to make the United Nations a more effective instrument in pursuit of the priorities of its Members.

In closing, let me stress that as we move ahead, I would want there to be an open process, with real dialogue between Member States and the Secretariat, based on mutual trust and confidence. That is the only way for our Organization to meet the diverse and many demands placed on it. Let us, then, in the words of the Millennium Declaration, "spare no effort to make the United Nations a more effective instrument" (*resolution 55/2, para. 29*).

The President: First of all, let me thank the Secretary-General for his introductory statement, in which he touched upon the essential aspects of his reform proposal, contained in the document entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387). I particularly welcome the fact that the Secretary-General clearly dispelled any anxiety that reform could lead to the curtailment of the development agenda of the United Nations.

Today, we have the report before us for consideration. In my view, the report of the Secretary-General is very good, comprehensive, timely and extremely useful. It was initiated by the Secretary-General and resulted from a thorough review of the work of the Secretariat, its mandates and its programmes. The report has been widely welcomed by the membership and deserves great credit.

We all know that the United Nations has already undergone changes in recent years. Its performance has improved, and it is now able to respond better to a wide

range of new challenges. But the United Nations reform of 1997 has not yet been fully completed. The United Nations still has many areas that need to be rationalized with a view to refining its functioning.

United Nations reform is a continuing process, and, therefore, I see the report as a stepping stone towards further improvements in the work of both the Secretariat and the General Assembly. That is why many of the Secretary-General's proposals could bring fresh ideas into the process of revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, which our presidency fully supports.

The initial informal response to the Secretary-General's proposals has been very positive. The report suggests a number of diverse improvements and innovative changes that would make the work of the United Nations more productive and efficient. I see the report as an important stimulus, to which we, the Member States, should react in a constructive way. United Nations reform is not and cannot be perceived as a unilateral action. It is a process in which the joint effort of the membership and the Secretariat is absolutely crucial for getting the second phase of reforms started and agreed actions implemented.

As members all know, the report was issued more than a month ago, and subsequently many regional briefings and one session of informal consultations have been held in order to provide additional information. Given the complexity of the issues, it is not surprising that many proposed actions still require further clarification. On the basis of consultations with a number of Member States, I have suggested that the Secretariat prepare a conference room paper that would provide written answers and explanations on all major issues raised by various groups or individual Member States, as well as on questions that I expect to arise during these important plenary meetings. We have agreed with the Secretary-General that such a paper will be prepared as a one-off exercise soon after this debate, so that it can be taken into account during the first round of the informal consultations. We believe that this approach will accommodate delegations' concerns and create an atmosphere of trust for further deliberations.

I recognize that what the Secretary-General has mapped out is an ongoing process. There are some actions within the purview of the Secretary-General for immediate implementation, and there are other actions that might need additional reports and/or further consideration by the relevant Committees next year. Many of the proposed actions call for measures to be taken by the Secretary-General with the endorsement and/or guidance of Member States. Our deliberations should result in formulating general directions for achieving agreed actions.

Let me now briefly inform Members how I intend to handle the process that will lead to the adoption of the resolution mentioned by the Secretary-General. Let me stress that this is going to be an open and very transparent process, in which all interested and concerned delegations will be involved. After this plenary debate, I will launch open-ended informal consultations as soon as possible, preferably on Friday morning, 1 November. I have already asked one Vice-President of the General Committee to help me lead the process and chair the informal consultations in my absence. I have also approached a number of Ambassadors with a request to assist the Vice-President and me in facilitating the process, and I shall announce their names before the end of the debate on this item.

I will carefully listen to the views, proposals and concerns of Members both at this plenary and during the informal consultations. After the debate and after the first round of the informal consultations, during which further clarification will be provided by the Secretariat, I will introduce the draft resolution, in which I will reflect those views. I hope that I can count on the constructive and active support of Members. I believe that, given good political will, the dedicated time and energy of concerned delegations and a bit of luck, we will have a workable, endorsed resolution before Christmas.

I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa, who will speak on behalf of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries and the African Union.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Allow me to recall these noble words:

> "We will spare no effort to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing all of these priorities: the fight for development for all the peoples of the world; the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease; the fight against injustice; the fight against violence, terror and crime; and the fight against the degradation and destruction of our common home." (*A/RES/55/2, para. 29*)

That is a quotation from the Millennium Declaration, endorsed by more than 160 heads of State or Government, who attended the Millennium Summit held in New York in September, 2000.

The Secretary-General has presented us with report the entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change". The emphasis on this being an agenda for further change is indeed deliberate and very necessary. We wish to state from the outset that we welcome the Secretary-General's report. We support his efforts to strengthen our Organization, and believe that a strong and effective United Nations can play a pivotal role in carrying out the core Charter mission which was reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration.

You, Sir, have invited Member States to engage in the strategic dialogue on strengthening this Organization. My delegation accepts your challenge and remains ready to assist you in any manner we can. We are troubled, however, by the suspicions and fears that the reform process seems to have provoked. Therefore, we resist the temptation to engage in detailed questioning of the intentions of our joint efforts. Instead, we choose to trust that the invitation for us to become part of an agenda for further change is in recognition of our joint responsibility to try to achieve the best for the good and welfare of our beloved United Nations.

In Africa we have come to recognize that there are dynamic linkages between development in our continent and the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. The establishment of the African Union and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is an acknowledgement by Africa that we need new institutions that are equipped to deal with the challenges of the new millennium. In our contribution to streamlining the African agenda in the General Assembly, we have already decided to cluster the three items on development in Africa. Already, the development issues on Africa — the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, the final review and appraisal of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the implementation of the Second Industrial Decade for Africa — were addressed in a joint debate in this Assembly.

We intend to take this process of streamlining African agenda items even further. The Secretary-General makes good proposals to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of the United Nations. They should be guided by decisions contained in the Millennium Declaration, the Durban Declaration, as well as the outcomes of the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. The mandates of those Conferences form the basis of the task this Assembly must carry out collectively. A clearly spelled out follow-up mechanism and a revised programme budget should integrate the follow-up processes. However, reform is an ongoing process, and should not become an end in itself.

We note, for example, that the Second Committee is engaged in intensive discussion on reforms, including considering the possibility of plastering macroeconomic issues on the agenda. We hope that will continue in a holistic and comprehensive manner and will inspire other Committees to do the same. That will avoid creating an impression that reform is limited to issues of development that are important to those of us from the developing world. We look forward to the implementation plan of the United Nations Development Group by September 2003, aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the Organization's presence in developing countries. We recognize the importance of joint programming at the country level, pooling of resources, common databases and knowledge networks, dedicated support for the Resident Coordinator and integrated planning, budgeting and resource mobilization tools for countries emerging from conflict. However, we believe that all developing countries can benefit from this reform; it should not be limited to those countries that are emerging from conflict. While the proposed actions can contribute to strengthening the effectiveness of the United Nations at field level, the critical element of core resources must also be addressed. We would like to see included in this action proposed methods for the mobilization of additional resources for the United Nations. Additional, predictable resources help drive development in Africa. The current trend is towards a diminishing of core resources for the United Nations, and Africa bears the brunt of the resultant cutbacks in United Nations activities.

The creation of an additional position of Assistant Secretary-General is welcome, especially if a purpose of this post is to support policy coherence as emphasized in the Monterrey Consensus. Such a person will also be valuable in monitoring the implementation and follow-up efforts to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg. It will be important for the post incumbent to interact with institutional and other stakeholders such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. When the post is filled, we assume that the issue of equitable geographical representation will be kept in mind.

The appointment of an Adviser for Special Assignments in Africa was of particular interest to Africans. It is important for that official to have access to the Secretary-General, since his Office is to be entrusted with an already agreed special mandate on Africa which, as described in the report, is open to different interpretations. We believe that the Office should have a particular mandate on NEPAD, and we urge the Secretary-General to continue to review it. The Assembly recently adopted resolution 57/2 on NEPAD. In that connection, the Office of the Adviser must review and report on United Nations system and other international support for NEPAD and on the coordination and implementation of summit and conference outcomes as they pertain to Africa.

We welcome the aim of supporting human rights at the country level, rationalizing and streamlining the work of the human rights treaty bodies, improving the working methods of the system of special procedures, and streamlining management and improving the financial situation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We look forward to the engagement of Member States in future plans, including the expanding of the mandates of Resident Representatives.

Regarding the budget, my delegation supports and is ready to engage in all efforts aimed at improving the effectiveness of the United Nations, as well as streamlining the budgetary and administrative activities of the Organization. These include giving the Secretary-General flexibility to deploy resources between sub-programmes to meet the challenges our Organization may face. We look forward to the General Assembly receiving the revised programme budget in 2003 and believe that it should reflect the priorities contained in the medium-term plan and other legislative mandates, incorporating the Millennium Development Goals.

We urge the Secretary-General to present an improved planning and budgeting system and to provide a more detailed proposal on the benefits and implications of the shorter medium-term plan as well as on the accountability and monitoring measures. We reaffirms the role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination in the planning and programmatic aspects of the budget cycle, and request that we jointly continue to look into measures to improve the working methods of the Committee.

There is probably no delegation that would not be proud to have its citizens serving as international civil servants in this Organization. Therefore, we urge the Secretary-General to take any steps that will improve the working conditions of Secretariat employees. We want our international servants to be proud to serve the United Nations, and this can be only if we ourselves feel proud to be part of a strengthened Organization.

Mr. Vallenilla (Venezuela): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the presentation of his report on the strengthening of the United Nations (A/57/387). At the outset, allow me to say that the Group wants to convey to him its full support for the intentions outlined in the report:

> "The present report suggests a number of improvements aimed at ensuring that the Organization devotes its attention to the priorities fixed by the Member States, and that the Secretariat gives better service". (*A/57/387, p. 2*)

That is a very clear statement, and is in line with our concerns for more efficient work from this universal institution. We must clarify that our remarks are basically related to the economic and social, information and budgetary issues on which the Group takes a position.

We are prepared to engage in any action oriented towards those high aims. Our framework in that regard will be defined by two considerations: First, none of the actions for change must have a negative effect on the capacity of developing countries to negotiate. That is particularly important with regard to the provision of services for meetings of the Group and in relation to publications supplying important elements for the decision-making of developing countries. The second

consideration is that none of these actions should limit the capacity of the Secretariat to deliver its full potential contribution to the development of developing countries.

The report of the Secretary-General presents a comprehensive set of ideas, based on what has been achieved since 1997 in strengthening this strong world body. In today's globalizing world, we can truly expect that the wishes and priorities of Member States, as well as the aspirations of civil society to a fully efficient Organization, will be pursued.

The report deserves comprehensive and holistic consideration by Member States in order to ensure a transparent and fully participatory approach to the reform of the Organization. As the Secretary-General may be aware, the Group has made a thorough reading of his proposals. As a consequence, we have found a number of issues on which we would like further clarification in order to assess the implications of the related actions. To that end, we formulated a series of questions and presented them to the Secretariat on the occasion of the informal consultations convened by you, Mr. President. These underline the keen interest of the Group in grasping the scope of the proposed reforms. Having our questions answered is indispensable if we are to make a just and proper evaluation of these outstanding issues. We are pleased to know that a document is being prepared in that regard, as just announced.

The reform process must strengthen the ability of the United Nations to fulfil its role and functions in the development field, with the General Assembly providing the leadership to ensure the fulfilment of the social and economic goals enunciated in the Charter. Many challenges remain for developing countries. As a result of the dynamics of global change, those challenges present themselves in a new domestic and international framework.

The process should be carried out with the primary goal of strengthening the capacity of the Organization to address development issues and to respond effectively to the development needs and priorities of developing countries. Reform proposals and measures must be fully consistent with the medium-term plan, which constitutes the principal policy directive of the Organization. The main objective of the reform measures and proposals should be to enable the United Nations to implement fully all mandated programmes and activities. This is not a matter of downsizing or an effort to achieve savings. The developmental tasks of the United Nations are of fundamental importance and may not be treated as secondary to other functions.

The financial implications of any reform proposals on which the General Assembly shall take action should be assessed carefully. Any proposal for change in the financial and staff rules and regulations required as a result of the implementation of reform measures and proposals should be submitted to the Assembly for its consideration and approval.

Once again, the Group of 77 and China would like to stress its full support for the need to reform our Organization. In that spirit, we would like to reiterate our positive and constructive approach to engage in further consultations on this issue.

At the beginning of this century, at the Millennium Assembly, Member States "decided to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing the priorities adopted in the United Nations Millennium Declaration" (*A/57/387, summary*). Now, two years later, we have gone through very important political processes in the economic and social fields. In addition, a number of very important commitments have been made in the Conference on Financing for Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Conference on Ageing and at the special General Assembly session on children, among others. We have created a network of commitments. The Organization has to respond to the challenges posed by the full implementation of those commitments. The world has gone through enormous political changes in the last decade. The United Nations must finally tackle its own restructuring in order to respond to the demands of the new times.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the Associated countries of Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to thank the Secretary-General for his initiatives to further

strengthen the Organization. Under his leadership, we have come a long way towards modernizing the United Nations. The European Union fully supports the process set in motion by the Secretary-General's report. Together we have improved United Nations effectiveness and stature, both here in New York and in the field.

If the United Nations is to be able to meet the continuing new challenges of this millennium, there is much more to do. Above all, consensus around the development agenda must become a reality. That development agenda took significant steps forward as a result of the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, the decisions taken in Rome, Monterrey and Johannesburg and the increased focus on the African continent enshrined in the membership's unanimous support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

We welcome the attention that these issues, among others, have received in the Secretary-General's report. That shows that strengthening the Organization is not an abstract activity pursued for its own purposes, but that this exercise provides the means to change the lives and well-being of the world's poor. It underlines the fact that the ultimate aim of our work in the United Nations is to make the world a better place for the poor people of this planet.

Two years ago, heads of State and Government set the goals and priorities of the Organization. Having adopted the blueprint, now is the time to ensure that the Organization is well equipped to implement these goals and priorities. The agenda we have before us, and the specific actions contained in it, constitute an invitation by the Secretary-General to Member States to strengthen the implementation capacity of the Organization. In that way, the United Nations can better assist Member States in implementing the Millennium Declaration and other crucial mandates of the Organization, including the follow-up to the Monterrey and Johannesburg summits. The European Union would like to accept that invitation, and move swiftly to the hard work that will commence once this report has been endorsed by the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General's proposed actions focus on implementation. They are practical and down-to-earth. They should, within the coming years, produce substantial improvements in the Organization. A clearer sense of the Organization's priorities means better and more efficient resource allocation, not budget cuts. The Secretary-General should do some things right away. Others have to be endorsed by us, the Member States, while still others will have to be discussed further by the General Assembly in the years to come, based upon, inter alia, further reports or in connection with next year's proposed budget for the 2004-2005 biennium. This process will generate tangible advantages for the entire United Nations membership, as well as for the Secretariat and its valuable staff, in terms of improved programme quality and delivery, transparency, accountability and value for money.

Let me give a few examples of where the European Union believes that the Member States and the Secretary-General, working together in a spirit of partnership, can deliver those tangible benefits.

The Secretary-General proposes to review some specific programme activities so as to improve the work of the United Nations — for instance, on important issues such as human rights and information and in the economic and social area. The European Union would like to stress the importance it attaches to strengthening the economic and social areas of activity in the United Nations, in particular in relation to Africa.

The world community has signed on to a new partnership for development, based on the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. In order for us to realize the commitments of the Millennium Summit and the results of major United Nations conferences, and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, thereby lifting more people out of poverty, implementation through this partnership for development has to be successful.

We attach special importance to giving high priority to Africa in the work of the United Nations. The birth of the African Union, the consolidation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the recent positive prospects of ending some of Africa's protracted conflicts — in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Somalia — are notable political developments that call for continued, strong and focused cooperation between the United Nations system and Member States.

We see the proposed strengthening of the economic and social areas of activity in the United Nations against this overall background.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the Organization's presence in developing countries must be strengthened by improving its effectiveness. We welcome the proposal that the United Nations Development Group should draw up an implementation plan to that effect. We also welcome the steps towards clarifying the roles and responsibilities in the area of technical cooperation.

The managerial capabilities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs must be strengthened, given the burden it carries. There is a need for a clearer definition of responsibilities, including a better division of labour between Headquarters and the United Nations field stations, as well as improved coordination between Headquarters and regional levels, including regional commissions. We support the strengthening of the role of the Adviser for Special Assignments as a means of sustaining the Organization's stronger policy focus on Africa.

In this regard, we also emphasize the need to consolidate and strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions.

The European Union remains supportive of involving civil society and the private sector in the work of the Organization. We look forward to the recommendations on improving modalities for United Nations interaction with civil society.

On human rights, the proposals of the Secretary-General identify the key areas where activities need to be reviewed and possibly strengthened. This is an area of work on which the European Union has always placed a high priority. And it is a matter of importance and concern for the General Assembly as a whole. There must be, therefore, the necessary degree of consultation with the relevant inter-governmental bodies in the implementation of the proposed changes.

The proposals for further improvement of United Nations information work are also very important. Strengthening the Organization in this field is crucial for securing continued popular support for the United Nations as the world's primary inter-governmental organization. Information work is constantly changing, driven by technological advance. That in turn requires a constant process of appraisal to make sure that the United Nations is reaching its target audiences and getting its message across with the most effective means possible. Reviewing the role of the United Nations Information Centres should be seen in that context and deserves serious consideration. The European Union stands ready in principle to take up the challenge in the Secretary-General's proposal aimed at making the information work in Europe more efficient, and looks forward to participating in discussions about its practical implementation, taking into account regional needs.

The budget cycle of the United Nations clearly needs modernization, so it can better serve a modern and efficient Organization such as the United Nations. The important first step is a more transparent and strategic budget document which clearly sets out the Organization's priorities and consequent resource requirements.

Therefore, the measures proposed by the Secretary-General on how best to present the budget to us — such as presentation of our priorities, briefer and more strategic documentation, fewer and more focused meetings and strengthening of the oversight and evaluation services — are very helpful.

We agree that the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, which will be submitted to us in 2003, should be thoroughly revised, so that it better reflects the priorities agreed to at the Millennium Assembly. Obviously, this must be done within the overall framework of the medium-term plan.

Similarly, our daily work will become more transparent and focused when we have streamlined the jungle of reports and meetings. Documents that are on time and more to the point and better management of the General Assembly and Conference Services means greater efficiency. And this will give better opportunities for all to play a more significant role in our work.

We support the continuing improvement of human resources management in the coming years. An Organization's most valuable asset is its staff, and an agenda for streamlining the United Nations must also address the need to continue to enhance the competence of United Nations personnel.

It is also crucial that Member States shoulder their responsibilities and find ways to streamline the inter-governmental process. Important work has

already begun on ways to revitalize the General Assembly.

We have noted that the Secretary-General's proposed actions regarding the budget generally build on the framework already established by the General Assembly, for the budget cycle in general, for the introduction of results-based budgeting and for the Financial Rules and Regulations. We believe that the United Nations membership should endorse this road map for streamlining the implementation of these existing mandates. We recognize that concerns among the membership have to be addressed. In our view, we should allow ourselves sufficient time to deal with those concerns. But we should also, at this session of the General Assembly, agree on the goal to be achieved — a more transparent, results-oriented and strategic budget for our Organization.

In response to the Secretary-General's report, Member States must now show the leadership needed and give a renewed mandate to the Secretary-General in order to strengthen the Organization. We must formulate our joint vision of new and more modern ways of doing business in the United Nations and ask the Secretary-General to start implementation.

At the same time, we must all be aware that the proposed measures cannot be implemented automatically or overnight. We the Member States will come back to these issues, in close dialogue with the Secretary-General, as part of the regular inter-governmental consultation, once the detailed implementation gets under way.

Achieving that calls for deliberations at a high level. Permanent Representatives, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General have an important task to perform in the coming days and weeks.

We all look to you, Mr. President, to lead us towards taking this first important step over the next few weeks. Please be reassured of the full cooperation of the United Nations to that end.

Mr. Naidu (Fiji): It is an honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group in New York: Australia, the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, as well as my own country, Fiji.

May I begin by offering our sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for submitting this report (A/57/387) to the Assembly. Under his exemplary leadership, the United Nations has already taken important steps towards strengthening the Organization.

The report before us constitutes a serious programme for continuing reform, stretching across numerous areas of United Nations activity. During discussion of the Secretary-General's reform initiative during his first term, much was made of the idea that reform was not an event but a process. Indeed, reform has been one of the hallmarks of the Secretary-General's tenure. This report contains further practical proposals for improving the United Nations work. More importantly, it also promises systemic reform which would make the Organization more flexible and responsive in meeting the priorities of Member States.

Improving the way in which the United Nations operates requires the membership and the Secretariat to move jointly towards shared objectives. It will be necessary for us to distinguish between proposals solely within the Secretary-General's purview and those which require inter-governmental decision. But we should not dwell on this too long. The more important point is that we should all be moving in the same direction.

For our part, we think the direction indicated by the Secretary-General is the right one. We believe that the Assembly should endorse that direction and take action where it can now. While we need to delve into details to form judgement on some of the proposals, we should keep our focus during this session on the strategic direction the Secretary-General has proposed.

A few weeks ago, in the plenary debate on the Millennium Declaration Goals and the work of the Organization, many speakers expressed a desire to see the United Nations move from setting objectives to a new phase of implementing them. Without implementation, the Millennium Declaration Goals and the objectives set at Monterrey and Johannesburg could become hollow promises.

We agree with the Secretary-General that there are areas in which the United Nations needs to do more. In particular, we agree that the United Nations needs to take a more comprehensive look at migration issues, as proposed in paragraph 39 of the report, and

to strengthen its capacities to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and international crime.

Action 1 of the Secretary-General's report is, therefore, very timely. The United Nations needs to be more flexible in adapting what it does to what we want to achieve. At present, the Organization's capacity to respond to new priorities set by Member States is seriously constrained by the rigidity of the program budget. It is only sensible that less relevant activities give way to higher priorities over time. All of our Governments do this. The existing budget rules already provide for it to happen here. The time has certainly arrived for the United Nations to begin to do likewise.

I speak today on behalf of a group composed mostly of very small delegations. The avalanche of documentation, the tremendous number of meetings, the long agendas of many committees, and the sprawling budget process reduce the capacity of small delegations to affect the decisions in the General Assembly. And, not only do they diminish the Assembly's democratic quality by effectively disenfranchising small delegations, they also render the Assembly less effective than it ought to be.

There is clearly only so much the Secretariat can do to improve the operation of the inter-governmental machinery. In Actions 11 and 13, by which the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management will play a more active role in managing documentation and meetings, the Secretariat is doing what it can. I spoke on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum on this topic in the Fifth Committee last week.

Our delegations believe that Member States should do more on this front, both under the rubric of reform and within the ambit of the revitalization of the General Assembly.

Action 12, proposing that the Assembly establish a review mechanism for reports, is worth developing. We could start that at this session.

We should consider renewed efforts to streamline agendas and shorten meetings. Despite some changes, the Assembly's agenda remains overloaded with the detritus of the past. Some judicious culling would make our work more manageable with little loss.

And, Action 3, recommending that the High Commissioner for Human Rights should consult with the human rights treaty bodies with the aim of streamlining reporting procedures, should lead to improvements in a vital, but unduly cumbersome, area of United Nations activity.

We look forward to discuss these ideas and others in our informal meetings.

Actions 21 and 22, which suggest principles for modifying the budget process, warrant careful consideration. The Secretary-General's diagnosis of the malaise in the budget process is compelling. The process takes far too long. There is too much wrangling over inconsequential issues. There is little capacity for Member States to provide strategic direction. And, despite enormous expenditure of resources by Member States and the Secretariat, the budget shows negligible change from biennium to biennium. Further, the disconnect between evaluation and planning remains too wide, inhibiting more responsive planning based on results.

In short, the process disadvantages small States and serves the United Nations poorly. Given the complexity of the issues involved, it is unlikely that we could agree on the specifics of a remedy during this session. But, we should begin the discussion now and we may be able to reach agreement on some principles as a first step.

The countries of the Pacific Islands Forum fully support the Secretary-General's continuing efforts to strengthen the United Nations. We hope that other delegations are also ready to move in the direction outlined by the Secretary-General. It is our belief that joint action by the membership and the Secretariat can produce a more responsive United Nations and a more participative and productive General Assembly, which will better serve the priorities of the Member States.

Mr. Mackay (New Zealand): I have the honour today to speak on behalf of the delegations of Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Our delegations strongly support reform. We do so, not for the sake of change itself or because we equate change with savings. We support change because we believe this Organization must be strengthened in order to meet Member States' expectations. Change in the way the United Nations goes about implementing its mandates is essential for improving not only its effectiveness, but also its credibility and visibility.

The Secretary-General has mapped out a way forward for the Organization, focusing on some key messages: doing what matters, serving Member States better, working together, allocating resources to priorities, and investing in excellence through United Nations staff. We endorse the purpose of the report — to make the Organization more effective, modern and outcome-oriented.

Collectively these changes will better equip the Organization to meet our common aspirations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. The Millennium Declaration is a valuable organizing concept to help us focus on urgent and current priorities. Agreed at the highest level as a road map for our Organization, it addresses the full spectrum of United Nations activity, from peace and security, to human rights, to sustainable development. It articulates shared, ambitious and concrete development goals. These reforms will therefore help the United Nations better to reflect the collective will of Member States. The constraints on our ability to do so are clearly set out in the Secretary-General's report — a cluttered agenda dominated by meetings and documents rather than by results. The 36,000 outputs currently on the United Nations books make it harder for the United Nations to respond to new demands. We therefore welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to propose in the next budget the closest possible alignment of resources and activities with current priorities.

At the heart of the Secretary-General's proposals is the need for a functioning and effective General Assembly. This is the only organ of the United Nations where we all have a voice.

But that voice is weakened by systemic inefficiency and by an overloaded agenda. The General Assembly must focus on key issues that require international action. As well as being the best use of resources, this would also make the workload more targeted and manageable for small delegations. I can do no better in this respect than to refer to the eloquent and articulate comments of the Permanent Representative of Fiji, who spoke just before me, in this respect.

Special conferences can play an important role, but we should ensure that they do not take over the role of our Charter organs.

The measures suggested by the Secretary-General offer an opportunity for us all to strengthen our participation in the United Nations. The legislative role of the intergovernmental process is very important. We think that a stronger and better-functioning Secretariat will not dilute that role, but, on the contrary, will strengthen it by enabling us better to exercise our decision-making responsibility.

We also welcome the proposals relating to conference management and documentation. While this section is entitled "Serving Member States better", we see it more as a collaborative exercise. We delegations need to be more disciplined in our use of meeting time and in the organization of our work. Member States also have a parallel obligation to reform the Assembly and other key organs. The delegations of Australia, Canada and New Zealand take this shared responsibility seriously. We therefore support the Secretary-General's suggestion that we consider a mechanism to look at recurring reporting requirements.

Our delegations see a pressing need for reform of the budget and planning machinery. The Organization's recent introduction of results-based budgeting is ill served by existing processes. We share the Secretary-General's logic that focusing on outcomes requires a realignment of resources against priorities. This should be supported by budgeting and planning mechanisms that can adapt to change, that are integrated and that encourage a more efficient and strategic approach to decision-making.

We have said before that we do not view change as a cost-cutting exercise. But we must acknowledge that the Organization faces a problem with resources. We must make the best use of the resources available. If we can streamline the process of planning and allocating budgets, this will free up resources to redirect to substantive mandates of the Organization. We do not have the exact details yet of how actions 21 and 22 will be implemented, but we are ready now to sign on to the key principles: the budget presentation should be more strategic; the planning and budget processes must be streamlined; and the budget and planning cycles should be aligned.

Many other elements in this report relate to work in progress that will produce results in future. The Secretary-General's commitment to a process of incremental change is reinforced by the tasking he has initiated within the Secretariat to look again at the way

programmes and systems work in the areas of technical cooperation, human rights, public information and human resources management. We welcome the across-the-board review of the information activities and human rights machinery of the United Nations. We see a need for a global, integrated approach to these activities. We look forward to seeing the results of the various reviews in due course.

We have before us a political document that requires a political response. The Secretary-General has prepared a comprehensive package that signals the future direction of his ongoing reform efforts. In his own words, "they cannot be implemented automatically or overnight". We have been asked to provide a strong endorsement for the report. We are happy to do so and would, in fact, have gone further. In the light of the challenges currently facing the international community, we see an urgent need to revitalize this most important of multilateral institutions. We need to act now. We need an Organization that can adapt and respond to the myriad challenges facing us — including achieving the Millennium Development Goals and responding to HIV/AIDS, globalization and terrorism — many of which myriad challenges were not conceived of when the Organization was established more than 50 years ago.

We endorse an incremental approach, but would urge that this not be so subtly incremental as to produce little discernible improvement in the near future. Obviously our decisions must be well informed and well considered. But at this juncture the Secretary-General asks us to sign on to the overall principle and direction — broad direction, as he said earlier — in his report. We are ready to do so.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group on item 52 of the agenda, "Strengthening of the United Nations system", an item to which the African Group attaches great importance, given its concern for the strengthening of the Organization and its desire to contribute to its efficiency in a manner that will enable it to deal with new challenges and opportunities.

The African Group wishes to express to the Secretary-General its sincere appreciation for his important report under consideration today, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change". We believe that that report includes many positive proposals that would improve the efficiency and increase the impact of the United Nations. I would like to apologize in advance for the detailed manner in which I shall address those issues on behalf of my Group. We would also like to endorse the statement made by Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The African Group believes that the strengthening of the United Nations is an uninterrupted sequence and an ongoing process that will not come to an end. It should be comprehensive, determining the long-term strategic direction of the Organization as well as the steps that are to be taken in the medium and short terms. Experts from the Group have carefully considered the report in various committees, as well as within the group of African ambassadors at the United Nations. The African Group has reached a preliminary position with regard to the content of the report, and has prepared a number of more detailed questions for the Secretariat with regard to the actions proposed in the report. A list of those questions is available at the side of the General Assembly Hall. The African Group looks forward to receiving clarifications from the Secretariat that will enable the Group to take a final position on the proposals and to participate effectively with States and groups of States in the consultations to be conducted in the coming weeks on the draft resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly on this issue.

In considering the proposals set out in the report, the African Group took into account not only the degree to which such proposals can be implemented, but also the consequences of their implementation. We therefore ask that a distinction be made between the proposals that fall within the purview of the Secretary-General and those that would require intergovernmental approval, or that might lead to conflict with mandates that have been established by the intergovernmental machinery, as those will require further careful consideration.

The African Group would also like to stress the importance of a harmonious and complete consideration of all efforts to strengthen the United Nations, to introduce innovations in the way in which the General Assembly works and to promote the Economic and Social Council and its substantive committees. We also accord great importance to following up the implementation of the resolutions adopted at the Millennium Summit and at other important international conferences and summits.

Given the strong link between all those objectives, they cannot be considered in isolation from one another.

The development agenda of the United Nations is of particular importance to the African Group. We have therefore always stressed the central role to be played by the Organization in formulating environmental, social and economic policies at the international level. The Group has repeatedly called for increasing the effectiveness of United Nations operational activities in the field and for bringing about the required coordination among all those activities in a manner that would help avoid any additional institutional burdens on developing countries and on African countries in particular.

The Group has also called for a more effective response by the United Nations to the sharp decrease that we have witnessed over many years in the basic resources of various programmes and funds, which is hindering the Organization's efforts to implement its programmes in support of the capabilities of developing countries. We therefore believe that action 14 should refer to the steps that will have to be taken in ensuring further, more predictable resource mobilization. While we welcome the contents of action 15 relating to the drafting of a document by 2003 to determine roles and responsibilities in the area of technical cooperation, the Group believes that the objective of such a document should do more than just assist donor countries to take decisions. Such a document should be considered within a comprehensive intergovernmental framework that would allow for guidelines to be drawn up to govern the Secretariat's work in that very important field.

The African Group also attaches great importance to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration of September 2000. That Declaration included many international objectives to which heads of State or Government committed themselves within specific time frames. Given our strong belief in the importance of implementing those objectives, and while welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Secretariat to promote those objectives and mobilize the necessary financial and institutional capabilities for their implementation, we would like to stress that it should not lead to any reduction in the importance of other development goals. Such goals were adopted by the international community at international conferences and summits and special sessions of the General Assembly that preceded the Millennium Summit, as well as those conferences that followed the Summit, such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development, the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the World Conference against racism.

The African Group believes that all the objectives set out and the decisions taken at summits and international conferences should be reflected in the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005.

In that regard, the African Group requests that the Secretariat, in the context of updating its approach to the implementation of Action 1 contained in the report of the Secretary-General, to present to the Assembly its views on the steps that can be taken to expedite the implementation of all African development goals, taking into account the fact that the African continent has not experienced the degree of progress enjoyed by other geographical areas.

The African Group emphasizes the importance of strengthening the Secretariat's work with regard to the African continent. The Group notes the decision of the Secretary-General, mentioned in the context of Action 18, to transfer the resources allocated to the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries to the Office of the Adviser for Special Assignments in Africa. The Group stresses the need for further clarification with regard to the details of the mission of the Adviser for Special Assignments and it requests that he present his reports directly to the Secretary-General, taking into account the international consensus that particular priority be given to Africa in the coming phase.

The Group also looks forward to receiving the Secretary-General's views concerning how the institutional capabilities of the United Nations will be strengthened in order to address, in a coordinated and effective way, the African continent's needs in the light of the General Assembly's decisions and of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative, as the new framework within which the United Nations and the international community will provide assistance to Africa. The African Group also requests, within that new institutional framework, the monitoring and follow-up of the fulfilment of the commitment of the United Nations and the international community in the implementation of NEPAD to ensure the needed harmony and

coordination among various departments of the Secretariat.

The African Group believes in the positive role played by the institutions of civil society and of the private sector as partners with Governments in formulating and implementing policies at the national, regional and international levels. We note with interest Action 19 contained in the Secretary-General's report, with regard to the interaction between civil society and the United Nations, as well as the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a panel of eminent personalities to consider the matter. In that regard, we should like to request that the guidelines for the panel be formulated within the intergovernmental context, taking into account the importance of equitable representation of developing countries and that the report and its recommendations be considered within the framework of the intergovernmental mechanism.

We note with great interest the proposed measures to promote the work of the United Nations system in the field of human rights. We should like to emphasize that the African Group fully endorses all efforts to promote the Organization's role in guaranteeing and protecting human rights. We should also like to stress the following important considerations: First, it is necessary that the general membership of the Organization debate and adopt any new approaches before their implementation and that linkages between human rights and development be avoided, including conditions in the Organization's operational activities that run counter to established practice and to the principles of universality, neutrality and multilateralism. Secondly, it is important that resident representatives of the United Nations limit themselves to their established mandates and that they not attempt to expand or exchange those mandates without the approval of the States concerned. Thirdly, while we welcome all efforts aimed at improving the reporting system for United Nations machinery, it is important to consider all aspects of that issue with the States concerned in a way that ensures effectiveness and applicability. Fourthly, in the implementation of human rights measures, it is important to be committed to established mandates, particularly in the case of Special Rapporteurs, some of whom have exceeded their mandates in a way that could undermine their neutrality.

The African Group supports all efforts aimed at the development of United Nations activities in the field of information and at strengthening the effectiveness of the Department of Public Information. Therefore, we believe that the Department's proposed restructuring should be initiated by consulting with Member States and should start with the Committee on Information. With regard to United Nations Information Centres, the African Group believes that the establishment of regional information offices would be beneficial only in areas that are advanced in communication and information technologies. Member States should establish guidelines for the application of such a proposal in a way that allows for separate consideration of each case and through consultations with host States.

The African Group welcomes the Secretary-General's proposals to develop, plan and coordinate publications in order to improve them and to make their contents more focused. The Group believes that any decision concerning the financial feasibility of publications should be taken in consultation with the United Nations intergovernmental bodies responsible for administrative and financial issues.

The African Group supports all efforts to enhance the efficiency and the impact of the United Nations, including the rationalizing of the Organization's administrative and financial activities. The Group would like to reaffirm once again the importance of rules and regulations governing programme planning and the programmatic aspects of the budget in the monitoring, implementation and evaluation process. The application of Article 105/6 (a) of those regulations should take into account the understanding that the adoption of the medium-term plan and of the programme budget constitute a reaffirmation of all the mandates that they include.

In conclusion, with regard to the Organization and its staff, the African Group welcomes the Secretary-General's proposals on mechanisms and incentives to encourage United Nations personnel to become more mobile within the Organization. We reiterate the relevant paragraphs of resolution 55/258 on human resources management, particularly with regard to the promotion of General Service staff to the Professional level. The Secretary-General may wish to consider an increase in the number of posts allocated to General Service staff, particularly those that are not subject to geographical distribution.

The African Group also welcomes the Secretary-General's intention to conduct a review of the internal justice system in order to enhance its effectiveness and to guarantee the equitable and legal treatment of all staff members.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General for initiating the new reform proposals aimed at transforming the United Nations into an effective universal Organization prepared to address global challenges. I should also praise the Deputy Secretary-General and her colleagues for preparing the report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change", which inspires new ideas and provides inputs for the Member States in their future deliberations on the topic.

Let me also associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Reform is not only a necessity, but also an obligation in setting up a dynamic international institution in the age of globalization. Although there have been some improvements so far as a result of the implementation of reform measures introduced and adopted in 1997, more changes have yet to be effectuated. The principal challenge ahead will be to enhance the capacities and to strengthen the capabilities of the multilateral machinery towards collective action in response to global demands and concerns. Hence, any reform proposal should refrain from offering selective approaches and rather present solutions on how to enable the United Nations to implement the priorities identified by its Member States, particularly during such recent global meetings as the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

A more vibrant General Assembly requires proper and necessary changes in its agenda and methods of work. Even more, its reform process should hinge upon the acknowledgement of the fundamental role of the General Assembly as the unique forum in which all States have an equal voice through the establishment of concrete and reliable mechanisms for the implementation of its resolutions.

The same approach may be chosen in respect of the proposed reform for the Economic and Social Council. Meanwhile, we agree with the Secretary-General that making the Council a privileged global forum for shaping development policies and strategies entails innovative measures, such as conducting dialogues with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization annually to better inform them of the sensitivities involved in their deliberations and policies vis-à-vis the composite difficulties which developing countries face. In this connection, reform of the Security Council should also be designed to promote an appropriate environment that upholds the imperatives of the balanced economic development of all regions in maintaining international peace and security.

We welcome the assertion of the Secretary-General of the importance of the development aspects of the work of the United Nations. However, there is no proposed concrete action in the report to ensure its adequacy and its success in practice. Among major priorities that have been identified in the outcomes of recently held conferences, only one or two areas have been addressed, while there are other numerous issues and priorities that have been left behind. In none of the sections of the report can a reference be found concerning the recent institutional agreements undertaken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in chapter X of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which has brought new changes to the work of the different parts of the United Nations system.

With regard to coordination at the country level and the proposed new functions for the resident coordinator system, it is absolutely clear that, in addition to budgetary implications, any modification in the already agreed mandates of the United Nations funds and programmes requires the prior approval of the Member States. Moreover, any proposal which puts forward new functions as a conditionality for the maintenance of development activities at the field level would substantially distort the scope, nature and mandate of the United Nations funds and programmes, as well as those of the resident coordinator system, thus jeopardizing their development-based agenda and counteracting genuine efforts to improve overall efficiency.

It is precisely in this context that my delegation is of the view that broadening the scope of the activities of the resident coordinator system in order

> "to ensure that human rights are incorporated into country level analysis, planning and programme implementation" (*A/57/387, para. 51*)

needs to be carefully discussed within the relevant intergovernmental frameworks and through the procedures designated by the United Nations. Benefiting from the ultimate support of partner institutions is highly recommendable, yet it should be done within the mandates of each and every component of the United Nations system. Any step beyond the mandate must come about through the established procedures of the United Nations. This basic assertion holds true for the reforms proposed in the area of treaty bodies and reporting obligations of the States parties, as well as for setting criteria for human rights special procedures. While we believe that reducing the reporting obligations and related burdens of States parties to the different treaty bodies is of crucial importance to them, the effort to remove ambiguities and the elaboration of best practices through the full participation of Member States in the relevant processes are also highly required.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The restructuring and review of the activities of the Department of Public Information should aim at strengthening the role and activities of the Department and not at its gradual diminution. Since some functions currently undertaken by the Department may not be consonant with its core mission, we think the review could be considered as an opportunity to focus more on relevant mandated activities. As regards the proposed rationalization of the network of United Nations Information Centres, the idea of regional hubs is a positive initiative for developed regions, but the issue is much more complex in the case of developing countries. We believe the role of United Nations Information Centres should be strengthened in developing countries. The Centres also need to continue developing their own web pages in local languages.

My delegation has noted the concerns expressed here regarding the number, coherence and impact of United Nations reports, as well as the planning and management of meetings. We believe that it is the prerogative of Member States to discuss and propose remedial measures within intergovernmental bodies and establish criteria for consolidating identical reports on cross-cutting subjects, while maintaining balance among various issues.

We welcome the idea of simplification and improvement in the planning and budgetary process of the United Nations. To better reflect priorities in planning, we need to ensure that all intergovernmental mandates — aside from the Millennium Declaration priorities, which are long-term in nature, but including those of the General Assembly and the outcomes of recent international Conferences — are incorporated in the medium-term plan as the basic strategic guidance underpinning the work of the Organization. This programme planning, updated by the required revision at the mid-point of its term, should continue to be based on political mandates. Hence, budget allocations should serve as the basis of decisions with regard to the planning of exercises or the possible termination of programmes, as in the case of sunset provisions. Efforts to improve the existing coherence between planning and budgeting exercises should not jeopardize the rationality and credibility of this process, which is based primarily on the imperative of allocating resources to achieve full implementation of the mandates given by Member States. To this end, the effective involvement of separate intergovernmental bodies — namely, the Fifth Committee and the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) — to perform these functions is fairly justified, taking into account that these bodies are rather complementary and mutually reinforcing.

We share the well-crafted vision of the Secretary-General concerning the reform of human resources development and management. The impact and vitality of the Organization rests upon having capable international staff, who represent a variety of dedicated, talented potential from all over the world. Promoting the excellence of the United Nations workplace needs to be pursued, but realization of the principle of equitable geographical distribution should be one of the main objectives of the reform in this area.

As regards the delegation of authority, we are of the view that, along with any delegation of authority, a clear mechanism of accountability should be in place. This provision, as well as many other issues, were discussed and decided last year by the General Assembly. The results of those deliberations were enlightening and continue to be a basis for consolidating diverse views in examining proposals.

In conclusion, Sir, I wish to assure you once again of my delegation's full cooperation in proceeding with the debates and deliberations on this subject in informal consultations.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Permit me first of all, Sir, to convey my sincere congratulations to the Secretary-General for his initiative in submitting a new series of proposals for reform in his report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387). This is a praiseworthy initiative that confirms yet again his determination to give new impetus to the process of reform in our Organization.

This initiative seeks to deepen the process of reform that was launched in 1997, the essential goal of which was the adaptation of internal structures and the culture of the United Nations to the new challenges facing it.

My delegation also associates itself with the statements made by South Africa on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and by Egypt on behalf of the African Group. At this preliminary stage of our consideration of the report, I would like to share with the Assembly some comments and views on some aspects of the proposed reform that are of vital importance to my delegation.

We welcome the fact that the President of the General Assembly anticipated our expectations by informing us of his intention to organize informal consultations to examine concrete proposals for which the Secretary-General is asking the approval of Member States. In this context and in light of the importance of the question, perhaps Permanent Representatives themselves should become involved in the process of negotiation and support the efforts of the experts, with a view to reaching agreement on this aspect of the formula.

On questions of substance, the report contains 35 proposals relating to such important areas as human rights, information, administrative and budgetary aspects and economic cooperation. We share the Secretary-General's view on the need to continue with reform, with a view to meeting the challenge of strengthening our collective capacity, thus forging a common destiny in a world of increasingly rapid change. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for having given us a succinct account of what has been accomplished in the realm of reform before suggesting to us what still remains to be done in this long process. Some of the actions contemplated are within the competence of the Secretary-General, and we thank him for having reported to Member States on it. Others are within the competence of intergovernmental bodies, which should examine them with care and transparency, in such a way as to make possible the participation of all delegations in the process of examination and decision-making.

As to the idea of re-focusing the activity of the Organization on priorities laid down during the Millennium Assembly, my delegation, repeating its commitment to the Millennium goals, would point out that these priorities are already an integral part of the medium-term plan for 2002-2005. In other words, the priorities laid down in the Millennium Declaration should not be allowed to replace the other legislative mandates, which should also be reflected in the medium-term plan.

We also wish to reaffirm the positive role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination as the consultative body of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the planning process. We believe that, in spite of certain shortcomings that are not specific to that body, the Committee is satisfactorily discharging its functions, such as verifying the existence of mandates for all the activities for inclusion in, or omission from, programmes contained in the medium-term plan and ruling on the conformity of the interpretation of these mandates with the decisions of the deliberative bodies. The Committee also has the task of verifying the technical correctness of the presentation of programmes and to ensure compliance with the priorities laid down in the medium-term plan. In that regard, I wish to stress that the most recent substantive session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, held last July, was exemplary in terms of its success and effectiveness, given that the Committee completed its work in four weeks instead of the six weeks initially scheduled.

The medium-term plan is the cornerstone of the cycle of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of the United Nations. Because it reflects in terms of programmes and sub-programmes the directives given by the deliberative bodies, the medium-term plan determines the general direction of the United Nations and is a framework for the preparation of biennial programme budgets for the

period covered by the plan. Thus, while noting the Secretary-General's proposal to submit a shorter medium-term plan, we would like to understand the advantages and implications that will be entailed in the implementation of that measure.

With regard to programme evaluation, it is important to continue to abide by rule 105.6 (a) of the regulations and rules governing programme planning, budgetary aspects connected with programmes, performance monitoring and evaluation methods. We belief that the lack of will or any other subjective reason which may have led to the ineffective implementation of a mandated activity should not automatically lead to ending it because of obsolescence. That is the main reason why, throughout the past few years, we have been opposed to the concept of sunset clauses, and we continue to be committed to the strict application of rule 105.6 (a), cited earlier.

Regarding human rights, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiatives to strengthen the United Nations system in the area of promoting and protecting human rights. Nevertheless, we would like a reform process affecting an issue as sensitive as human rights to take place in the spirit of the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna in 1993, taking into account the indivisible and interdependent character of human rights and the principles of non-selectivity and impartiality, which should guide this very delicate reform exercise. This exercise is necessary, particularly in terms of rationalizing the procedures for drawing up reports by treaty bodies and for the management methods of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We also note with satisfaction the Secretary-General's commitment to strengthening information as a key element of reforming and revitalizing the United Nations system. However, reform of the Department of Public Information should not depend solely on financial criteria. In our view any reorientation of the Department should have the effect of maintaining and improving its activities of particular interest for developing countries and should be aimed at bridging the gap between the developing countries and the developed countries in that critical area. We urge the Secretariat to continue its consultations with the Committee on Information on restructuring or reorienting the activities of the Department of Public Information.

With regard to the proposal to create regional information centres, we note that many regional hubs are located in regions where costs are very high and where information and telecommunication infrastructures are well developed. In less favoured regions, that operation should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the host countries concerned.

The recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg, are critically important to strengthening international economic cooperation. In that regard, we believe that it is timely to integrate the follow-up of the fulfilment of commitments into the process of following up the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, which would make possible the adoption of a comprehensive, coherent and integrated approach in attaining development goals.

The African continent, whose specific needs were a priority of the Millennium Summit, should continue to receive special attention. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which enjoys the solid support of the international community, deserves substantial support consistent with its ambitions, particularly through strengthening the relevant Secretariat structure so that it can effectively take charge of the international community's support activities for the implementation of NEPAD.

Those are a few comments on the Secretary-General's proposals for reform; and I wish to assure the Assembly of the wholehearted cooperation of my delegation and of its readiness to contribute constructively to the successful outcome of our deliberations on this important question.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): The Kingdom of Morocco is genuinely pleased to take part in this debate and to make a modest contribution to the Assembly's collective reflection on reforming the United Nations. We wish to warmly thank the Secretary-General for having introduced to us this morning a very useful and stimulating report on strengthening the Organization (A/57/387).

A strong, credible and effective United Nations is in the interest of all Member States, whatever their status, their level of development or the means available to them. That is why the objectives of which Mr. Kofi Annan reminded us this morning deserve our

support and, undoubtedly, that of the entire Assembly. It is in everyone's clear interest to further rationalize our work, to make better use of the resources available to us, to avoid duplication and overlapping and, finally, to endow the executive branch with the most modern tools, so that it can carry out the tasks with which we have entrusted it. Those tasks are becoming increasingly complex; they are in keeping with the phenomenon of globalization, which imposes on the international community the duty of turning the United Nations into a credible and efficient regulatory body, because, as has been said, if the market is becoming global, then the rules must also become global. The regulatory activity that is expected of us ranges from international trade, financing for development and protecting the environment to combating crime and terrorism. As we all know and we unfortunately see today, terrorists have formed an international network and it is only through prosecution at the same level, that we can effectively combat their activities. We welcome the 9 September 2002 report. It is part of the reform activity initiated in 1997. However, reform is not an overnight phenomenon, nor a miracle. As Mr. Kofi Annan reminded us, it is a continuous effort and we must be in it for the long run.

It is no exaggeration to say that the very survival of the Organization probably depends on successful reform. In a world undergoing fundamental change, we can no longer expect to succeed through the use of methods and responses from the second half of the twentieth century, from a bygone world.

We also know that we cannot simply tear down our own house, which is why we completely support the Secretary-General's method. He begins by asking us to focus on the indispensable tools for change, planning goals and establishing what means would be suitable to attain the goals. The planning and budgeting must go hand in hand and must be envisaged and carried out within a reasonable period of time, for example two years as the Secretary-General suggested.

We support wholeheartedly his proposal, although we believe that during implementation, we will have to make planning and budgeting less bureaucratic. We should not be ashamed, but must adapt to the world as it is. Envisaging the plan and budget will be based on technical information provided by the administration, but it must be carried out at the higher political level, the level of the Secretary-General.

We are also convinced that the Secretary-General must enjoy, as he has requested, a degree of flexibility in terms of managing the overall budget. This flexibility we are entrusting to the highest official of the Organization and will have to include evaluations and reports to the governmental bodies, that will, in turn, evaluate the initiatives taken and make the necessary recommendations. These bodies include the Fifth Committee as well as the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC).

Nowadays, no efficient institution will succeed without good management, or good governance. The Secretary-General must be sure to achieve his objectives at the least possible cost and will have to reallocate resources according to new developments on the international scene. He will have to keep up a dialogue with the main organs of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council and the General Assembly. In other words, when he is allocating resources he will have to do so on the basis of a dialogue held through proper channels.

The General Assembly has universal status, but it will have to restructure itself if it wishes to face the new challenges before the Organization and new work methods. Today we hear about revitalizing the General Assembly, as if it was an ill patient requiring more energy. In fact what is necessary is just to bring our General Assembly and its methods in line with the increased number of Members, the nature of the questions it addresses, and evolution and developments in modern techniques of communication and information.

These tasks I have described must take place at the same time as the reform of the Secretariat, for this is the only way to ensure that reform will have the best impact. We are happy to see that the Presidency, aware of this link between reforming the Secretariat and revitalizing the General Assembly intends to emphasize revitalization at the very moment when reform of the Secretariat is under way.

We hope this activity of general interest will be carried out without reference to any special interests, and with the desire to ensure that those who are most ready to serve the reform and are best qualified will place themselves at the service of the Organization.

The United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of its Member States. But when we refer to States, as well as individuals, as we know some are

more equal than others. Africa is the continent that is least well endowed, and has suffered the most from developments that have occurred throughout the world over the last quarter century. It is therefore almost natural for everyone to display active solidarity towards the African countries, and this solidarity should be reflected by the Secretariat through a focal point, a special adviser to Mr. Kofi Annan, as has been proposed, who will coordinate and centralize the executive activities of the United Nations in the direction of Africa, because today's activities are too scattered. This activity will include something my country values highly, attention to the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

In order for an organization to exist, it must act and it must disseminate information. It must communicate with its environment and receive feedback so it may permanently regenerate. However, should we try to communicate as we were communicating during the post-war period in the last quarter century? This is why we approved the Secretary-General's proposals to modernize the Department of Public Information (DPI) to enable it to perform better and cost less. In undertaking this reform of DPI, the needs of the developed countries and their concerns are not the same as those of the less well-endowed countries, in particular in Africa as I mentioned earlier.

It goes without saying that any reform process must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that its final objective is the human being. The United Nations has played an indispensable part in promoting human rights, in making them acceptable and habituating the most diverse cultural sensitivities to their importance. These past efforts, these geological layers, as it were, should today be evaluated globally in order to find more appropriate oversight mechanisms for the preservation of human rights.

It is obvious that the multiplication of committees of experts depending on this or that convention is a method that can be faulted, because it compels even the least well endowed countries to prepare multiple overlapping reports that require the services of experts. We believe this assessment process should be entrusted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and he should propose the most appropriate manner of simplifying these processes from the legal and technical points of view.

The Kingdom of Morocco supports the efforts to reform the United Nations undertaken by Mr. Kofi Annan. We believe we must move forward by adopting the areas of reform on which a consensus has formed within the Assembly. The remaining areas can be remitted to a follow-up group that could begin working next year. Through that group, which could be an open-ended working group, States could continue their dialogue with the Secretariat.

Increasingly, in a troubled world, people look anxiously to the United Nations in the hope of finding comfort. We must act. We have no right to disappoint them. We must act. We must respond to the expectations of those who look to us.

Mr. Mejdoub (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): One week has passed since we celebrated United Nations Day. A retrospective analysis of our Organization's 57 years of existence enables us to conclude the following.

The United Nations has not lost any of its relevance. The world needs the Organization more than ever to restore order in the global village, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. The multilateralism that our Organization embodies has proved vital for the establishment of international relations founded on democracy, inclusion, equality, justice and the equal sovereignty of States.

But the system we inherited following the Second World War needs to be brought up to date. During the past two decades, the world has experienced profound changes, in particular globalization, with all its positive and negative effects. Those changes need to be reflected in the structural and operational apparatus of the United Nations system, which now has the dual responsibility of adapting to the needs of our time and of shaping the course of future events to avoid directionlessness.

However, the United Nations is not an autonomous entity with its own sovereign decision-making power. Its action or inaction depends on the collective decisions of its Member States. The Organization's effectiveness is dependent on the means and resources that we, the Member States, put at its disposal. Its effectiveness also depends on our capacity to reconcile and even to restrain our national interests in the interest of the larger community.

It is on the basis of these observations that my delegation would today like to assess the series of reforms presented by the Secretary-General in his report (A/57/387). In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, a far-sighted man who has been able to perceive the virtue of change in a world where change is the only constant. He has made the strengthening of the United Nations his personal cause. Through his actions he has shown himself to be much wiser than we are, and history will undoubtedly prove him right.

I would also like to salute the efforts of Ms. Louise Fréchette aimed at clarifying the proposed reforms for the benefit of the Member States and to express to the President our gratitude for the initiatives that he has taken to facilitate the process of consideration of the Secretary-General's recommendations so as to bring the process to a successful and prompt conclusion.

My delegation associates itself with the common African position on the Secretary-General's measures and proposals for reform. I will thus limit myself to making the following comments and observations.

The Secretary-General's report, which we welcome, is part of a larger agenda and continuous process of reforming our Organization. It therefore goes without saying that the structural, administrative and budgetary reforms presented by the Secretary-General are not in themselves a sufficient response to the need to adapt our Organization to the requirements of today's world. In fact, as the Secretary-General has rightly indicated, the reform of the United Nations will not be complete until the composition of the Security Council is modified and its efficiency and credibility are strengthened by improving its working methods and its decision-making process. Here, I am specifically referring to the veto power.

It is equally obvious that the reforms presented cannot succeed unless the General Assembly is revitalized. For that to happen, more than just cosmetic changes are required. It is imperative that we restore to the General Assembly, the truly universal and democratic organ of the Organization, its genuine role as described in the Charter. Its prerogatives should be maintained and respected by the other principal organs of the Organization, and its authority vis-à-vis those organs should be fully exercised in the area of the maintenance of peace and security, as well as with regard to economic, social and governance issues.

The reform process initiated by the Secretary-General, if we make good use of it, is likely to give our Organization a strategy for achieving concrete, tangible results. The United Nations programme of work needs, as a matter of fact, to be rationalized. It should be organized around the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration and around the outcomes of the major conferences, particularly the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. These goals should be reflected in the Organization's medium-term plan and its programme budget in a way that is coherent and which allows us to measure the effective implementation of those goals by means of results indicators. However, those objectives should not replace other existing mandates. Rather, they should complement them within the framework of an integrated strategy based on the priorities identified by the Member States.

Such a strategy should allow us to avoid the overlapping within our Organization, which the Secretary-General describes in his report. That overlapping results in a waste of energy and resources, considerable loss of time and, to a certain degree, inconsistency among the decisions of the legislative bodies. All those factors combined diminish the efficiency of our Organization. We therefore support the Secretary- General's proposals to regroup certain agenda items, to present consolidated reports on closely related questions, to make use of new technologies and to end activities that are deemed to be useless. In that regard, we believe that such a rationalization, which we support in principle, must be carried out in consultation with Member States.

Development in all its dimensions should be central to the Organization's concerns. In fact, development should be the Organization's top priority. Every debate we have had has illustrated beyond doubt that the threats confronting our world cannot be alleviated or eliminated until people are freed from the yoke of poverty that usurps their right to basic human dignity. The right to development should be considered equal to other fundamental human rights and should be promoted through all of the activities of the United Nations system.

In that regard, we are pleased with the attention that the Secretary-General has given to activities aimed at benefiting Africa, as well as with his decision to designate an adviser for special assignments in Africa. We hope that the mandate to be given to that adviser will measure up to the expectations of African countries, in particular as they relate to the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Reform should not be motivated by budgetary concerns. The Secretary-General has clearly indicated that his goal is neither to reduce the budget nor to respond to conditions imposed from outside. That is reassuring to us, and the Secretary-General has our full confidence. Nevertheless, we hope that the Member States will not impose financial considerations as determining factors in drawing up our reform programme.

The set of reforms put forth by the Secretary-General should be put into effect gradually and should be subject to systematic evaluation. We note that some aspects of the reform — particularly those associated with human rights and information — will be the subjects of further recommendations by the Secretary-General that will be based on studies to be submitted to him. We also note that some proposals, especially those related to the administrative and budgetary areas, still require further clarification. The issue of accountability also needs to be examined in more depth, and an adequate system of responsibility and control needs to be established. We also believe that the competent bodies of the General Assembly should also look at various technical issues further before the General Assembly takes a decision.

I would like to conclude by reiterating our appreciation for the new reforms proposed by the Secretary-General and by assuring the President of my delegation's full cooperation in the process of negotiation that he will initiate following our debate. We rely on him to preserve the transparency of that process and to ensure its openness.

Mr. Negroponte (United States): I am pleased to address the General Assembly today on the Secretary-General's latest initiative aimed at strengthening this indispensable Organization. I join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his dedicated stewardship. We also wish to offer our compliments to President Kavan for providing the opportunity to discuss this highly important issue.

Last Thursday, President Bush, in proclaiming United Nations Day in the United States, said that America joined the world in commemorating the founding of the Organization and in recognizing the profound impact it has had on our world. He also reaffirmed the dedication of the United States, as a founding Member, to advancing human rights, security and education throughout the world through the works of the United Nations. Many other nations have made similar proclamations. It is therefore most appropriate that we gather here, just a week later, to discuss and agree on how the United Nations is to fulfil its critical role in the years ahead. The United States has always believed that a strong, well-managed Organization focused on its most important priorities is essential to ensuring that the needs of Member States are fulfilled.

With the issuance of his latest report on reform, entitled "Strengthening the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387), the Secretary-General has provided a new and valuable framework for pursuing a programme of continuous improvement in the Organization. While the United States has always endorsed the Secretary-General's concept that reform is a process, and not an event, we also believe in the need to quicken or re-enforce the process. Achieving modernization, effective oversight and the elimination of redundant and obsolete functions are integral steps in that process. For this reason, "An agenda for further change" is timely in providing a road map for improving the Organization's many programmes, structures and operations.

In recent years, considerable progress has been made in improving the working methods of the United Nations. The staff and structure of the Secretariat have been streamlined; important changes have been made in human resources management; the scales of assessment have been updated; peacekeeping management has become more efficient and effective and United Nations budgeting has become increasingly focused on results. The Secretary-General's latest report builds on those improvements to maximize the use of valuable resources and to ensure that the Organization's work is aligned closely with the Millennium Declaration Goals. We endorse his approach and his package of actions in their entirety. I would like to comment, however, on a few key elements.

We look forward to a thoroughly revised programme budget for 2004 and 2005 that will better

reflect the priorities of Member States. In the same vein, we are encouraged by the steps listed in the report to improve the budget process, including the critical function of programme evaluation.

The measures aimed at improving intergovernmental coordination and avoiding duplication are long overdue and also most welcome.

In the important field of human rights, actions to strengthen United Nations activities at the country level and to improve the overall management of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights deserve priority attention. We warmly welcome the Secretary-General's selection of Sergio Vieira de Mello as the new High Commissioner.

Repositioning public information and conference services is an essential component of a continuous improvement programme for the Organization, since they use an inordinate share of the overall budget and can make important contributions to substantive programmes and activities. We support the bold approach taken to rationalize conference services, to reduce the number and volume of reports produced and to address the question of the number of meetings held. We would expect a similarly innovative and aggressive approach to be followed for the public information function that could be implemented in less than three years.

Because people are the United Nations most important resource, we are especially attracted to the measures in the field of human resources. Accelerating recruitment, increasing the retention of qualified people and improving mobility are all welcome components of the initiative, while bearing in mind the standards of Article 101 of the United Nations Charter.

Without exception, the actions laid out by the Secretary-General to maintain the United Nations as a relevant and responsive institution are excellent ones. They are fully consistent with the authorities and responsibilities given to him as chief administrative officer by Member States. As he implements his plan, we pledge our support. We stand ready to assist in whatever way we can. We join with other members in the Hall in committing to making the Organization better and more responsive to the needs of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): To avoid any misunderstanding at any point in time about my remarks, let me stress at the outset that we fully support the Secretary-General's report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387). We also support his call for a strategic decision on this matter and, at the same time, we also support the open and transparent procedures that the President has suggested for the implementation of, and follow-up to, the report. I will comment on the report specifically a little later in my remarks. I thought that, in the first half of my remarks, it would be useful to encourage a discussion at the strategic level on the issue of United Nations reform, as we have been called upon to provide a strategic decision.

Before doing that, I would like to mention a small personal anecdote. I might possibly be one of the few veterans of United Nations reform present here. In 1986 I was invited by the then President of the General Assembly to serve as a member of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts set up to reform the United Nations, which was known as the Group of 18. And one little story taught me a valuable lesson. When I served on the Group of 18, we looked very hard to try to find parts of the United Nations system that could be trimmed, cut off or shut down. We had great difficulties but, in the end, we managed to find one little-known United Nations committee that we thought was no longer necessary. If I remember correctly, I think it was the United Nations Committee on Taxation. We all agreed that that Committee was really not central to the work of the United Nations and that it could be shut down. On the last day of our meetings, just as we were about to adopt our report, the delegate of the United States walked in to say that he was terribly sorry but the United States Treasury had informed his delegation that they saw value in the continuation of the Committee on Taxation, and would we not mind if it were not shut down.

The moral of the story here is that United Nations reform is inherently difficult if we try to go for the specific items to be removed, because each Member State has a vested interest in one or another part of United Nations programmes. Therefore, before we go into the details, we need to do a strategic review from a sort of "helicopter perspective" to see how the United Nations looks in the world today and to look at its role.

Against that backdrop, I hope that the key question that we will try to address in this debate is

that of why we need to reform. I believe there may be five possible answers.

The first might be that we are trying to reform because the United Nations is too big or huge. That cannot be so because, as an Organization, the United Nations actually has a light footprint. If my memory is correct, the world's gross national product (GNP) today is about $30 trillion. The annual United Nations budget is $1.5 billion. If my quick calculation is also correct, that comes to 0.005 per cent of the global GNP. That is literally and metaphorically a drop in the ocean. So if it is merely a drop in the ocean, is the purpose of our reform to make that drop even smaller, or is it to make that drop a little bigger, given the increasing demands made upon the United Nations?

The second possibility may be that we are trying to reform the United Nations because it is too inefficient. Certainly, the United Nations bureaucracy must have its share of inefficiencies, and so forth. But as we try to reform the United Nations, are we clear in our minds about the benchmarks for progress? To which civil service in the world are we trying to compare the United Nations civil service? If it is inefficient, to which standards are we comparing it? Having worked quite closely in the Security Council with at least two departments — the Department for Public Information (DPI) and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations — I would say that, frankly, from my personal experience, those two Departments are possibly already world-class operations and perhaps could teach the rest of the world's civil services how to operate. So if we say that the United Nations is inefficient and needs to be improved, we need also to establish the standards necessary to be able to say that.

The third possible reason to reform may be that we are fundamentally going in the wrong direction as an Organization. If that were so, if the United Nations were fundamentally headed in the wrong direction, then why is it that every time we hold a summit all the heads of State and Government turn up here to fill the Hall with their presence? The reason they come here is that the United Nations serves very effectively as the spiritual centre of the intergovernmental process. Indeed, I would also say that, in one of the most crucial roles it plays, the United Nations is the leading temple of legitimacy to which all agendas have to be brought and legitimized. Whether in the areas of development, the environment or the fight against terrorism, whatever one's agenda, it must be brought to this Hall to have it legitimized before the global community cooperates. The fact that the world comes here to wrap its agendas in the mantle of United Nations legitimacy suggests that the United Nations may not be fundamentally going in the wrong direction.

The fourth possibility is that the priorities may be wrong, that the United Nations might, in a sense, have wrongly allocated its priorities. Frankly, this is an area in which we can have a real discussion to address, as Ambassador Kumalo said earlier in this meeting, "the suspicions and fears that the reform process seem to have provoked". But to address that we have to ask ourselves what the real priorities of the United Nations system are. In that regard, if we had to identify the first priority we could not state it better than the way it was stated in the intervention earlier today on behalf of the European Union: "The ultimate aim of our work in the United Nations is to make the world a better place for the poor people of the planet."

We endorse that call by the European Union. We also agree that the primary goal should be to ensure that the United Nations helps to make life better for the poor people of the planet. But if that is the case, we can indeed ask ourselves a very simple question: at present, are our priorities designed to achieve that? Of course, if we study the United Nations budget in detail, we might be able to get a sense of how much money really goes, or does not go, to helping the poor. One concrete suggestion I would like to make in this regard is to produce a pie chart that shows the percentage of the United Nations budget that goes to reducing global poverty and promoting development. That might clarify the picture and enable us to assess whether or not there are sufficient resources going to development activities.

The fifth possible reason for reform, one that I know is a delicate issue, may be that the major contributors are unhappy with the direction of the Organization. Unfortunately, there is more than a grain of truth in this observation. In the past few years, the reform process has been driven by the major contributors, who feel troubled by several different dimensions of the work of the United Nations. Indeed, as we heard in the statements made just this morning, there is a troubling North-South differentiation on the issue of United Nations reform. In our view, that need not be the case. It need not be the case that the North should be supporting reform and the South should be

suspicious. In our view, both the North and the South can be equally enthusiastic about supporting reform. But to achieve that, both the North and the South must develop a common mental framework of what the reform process is all about. We have got to be clear about what the goals are and what we are trying to achieve. We must also be clear about how reform serves the interests of everyone in the United Nations community — how it serves the North and how it serves the South. We hope that this will be one of the outcomes of this debate.

By the way, in that regard I would also like to mention and reinforce the point that was made in this debate by the Ambassador of Tunisia, Noureddine Mejdoub. About the effectiveness of the United Nations he said that it "is also conditioned by capacity to know how to reconcile, or sometimes to restrain, our national interests with, and for the sake of, the larger community's interest." That is our challenge in today's debate. Can we, in an effort to strengthen the United Nations, sometimes put aside our national interests for the sake of strengthening collective interests? We hope that this can be done.

There is one other point that I would like to touch on before turning specifically to the Secretary-General's report. In one of our earlier statements in the Hall regarding the revitalization of the Organization, we said that the United Nations rests on the tripod comprised of the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Security Council. The report before us today frankly addresses in great detail the areas of reform pertinent to the Secretariat. It also addresses in great detail the areas of reform concerning the General Assembly. But there is little or no mention of the Security Council, even though the Council is today probably the single most important member of the United Nations family.

After having served almost two years on the Security Council, it is our observation that the Council can also do with administrative reforms. I think that, as many here have observed, we have tried to do that with the Security Council's annual report to the General Assembly, in an effort to try to trim its length. In fact, we succeeded in cutting the report almost in half, saving the United Nations a few hundred thousand dollars in the process.

But let me be candid. While we expected that all members of the Council would have supported us, we were actually surprised to find that there was resistance. I can tell the Assembly that some of my colleagues almost literally had to sweat blood to get support to do something that we thought was very obvious, namely, trimming the report. The tragedy is that some of the States here supporting reform in the General Assembly and the Secretariat were resistant to reform in the Security Council. We think that if that becomes known, it would undermine the process of reform.

It is important that all three elements of the United Nations family — the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Security Council — show an equal commitment to reform. By the way, that is why we support paragraph 21 of the Secretary-General's report, which concerns the need for the Security Council to codify its practices. We also support paragraphs 168 and 169, which deal with streamlining and the peacekeeping operations budget. Incidentally, we must remember that the budgets for peacekeeping operations are much larger than the regular budget. They, too, should be scrutinized.

Let me now turn to the report itself. We do want to commend the Secretary-General and, of course, the Deputy Secretary-General, for producing a concise and well-written report. I also want to say that it is eminently readable, as I read it over a weekend.

I will state upfront that our delegation is in agreement with the analysis presented and with most, if not all, of its 36 recommendations. Judging from the interventions made during the discussions on the agenda item concerning the revitalization of the General Assembly, no one would disagree with the Secretary-General's observation that the General Assembly remains weak. Frankly, the only question that we cannot answer in this debate is where the leadership will come from in terms of improving the General Assembly. The Secretary-General cannot provide that leadership. After all, he is a civil servant serving the Organization. If the General Assembly is to be improved and revitalized, that leadership must come from Member States. If it does not come from Member States, we then have to produce the leaders from the intergovernmental body to do so. We indeed hope that some will emerge. But in terms of making suggestions about how to make the Secretariat of the United Nations a more efficient organization, there is no doubt that the Secretary-General has come forward with many important suggestions.

We would like to add that in this process the Secretariat and Member States should see themselves as being in a symbiotic partnership. There must be trust on both sides. The Secretary-General is seeking more flexibility in implementing the mandates that we set. For our part, Member States must take a pragmatic approach and resist the urge to micromanage the Secretariat. In other words, I believe that we should all welcome the thrust of the Secretary-General's proposals and not take issue with too many details. While there are bound to be some specific concerns, we should not let this override the broader need for authorizing the Secretary-General to take expeditious action with regard to continuing the reform effort he started in 1997.

Certainly, there are several areas highlighted in the report — particularly the sections on reforming the budget process, human resources reform and the strengthening human rights — that will require more detailed information and further consideration by the General Assembly. We trust that, as he did during 1997, the Secretary-General will come up with an implementation plan that addresses those issues comprehensively.

In deciding how to proceed we must first be clear in our minds about which recommendations fall under the Secretary-General's authority as chief administrative officer and which areas require General Assembly approval. We support him in immediately implementing those that fall strictly within his mandate. As we will soon say in a speech at the Fourth Committee, those include, for example, the efforts made to revitalize DPI. In our view, there are perhaps only four or five actions — particularly those dealing with the budget — that will require action on our part.

Having said that, I hope that we in the Assembly will take a strategic decision on the report, as requested by the Secretary-General. That would be the correct approach, which is not to say that the details are unimportant. However, they can be dealt with in due course at a later stage. We believe that our immediate priority right now should be to send a clear message of support to the Secretary-General.

In conclusion, let me quote the Italian Statesman Niccolò Machiavelli. I know that Machiavelli is not necessarily quoted positively, but this is something he said that was positive: "Whoever desires constant success must change his conduct with the times". We hope that all three members of the United Nations tripod — the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Security Council — will change with the times to ensure that the United Nations remains relevant and strong.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The future of the United Nations is uncertain. Its very existence is threatened by unilateralism. We must save the United Nations. At the same, we must carry out a thorough reform of the Organization that makes a daily reality of the sovereign equality of States, which today is no more than a mirage. In our opinion, the essential goal of reform is the democratization of the United Nations, based on the full respect of the Charter.

However, as aptly stated by the Secretary-General in his valuable report (A/57/387), there has hardly been any progress in the reform and democratization of the Security Council, after a sterile decade of negotiations and despite an overwhelming majority that is in what one representative called "general agreement" on the need to increase the Council's membership in order to remedy the under-representation of the developing countries, on the urgency of eliminating or least temporarily restricting the use of the anti-democratic and obsolete veto power and on the need for transparency in the Council's functioning, on behalf of all Member States, by replacing the secret confabulations known as informal consultations and finally adopting its eternally provisional rules of procedure.

The most necessary and urgent element of the reform of the United Nations is the democratization of the Security Council, whose lack of legitimacy and effectiveness, loss of credibility and double standards endanger the very existence of the Organization.

The revitalization of the General Assembly is also a decisive element of genuine reform of the United Nations. The United Nations will become more democratic and effective only when the General Assembly fully exercises its powers under the Charter. The vast majority of the Member States demand this. But, under the exclusionary, inequitable and untenable international order with which we are burdened, it is difficult for the Assembly to formulate thorough and effective action based on our common goals and on the shared interests of those of us who champion

multilateralism and who possess the strength of the great majority of votes.

Cuba also agrees that is necessary to create a United Nations that is more efficient and dynamic in carrying out the purposes and principles of the Charter, in effectively carrying out the priorities of the United Nations established by Member States and in responding to the various challenges that today's international situation imposes on Member States.

The reform of the Organization must be comprehensive and not be fundamentally confined to the administrative and managerial structure of the Secretariat. The reform must include all principal and subsidiary organs and must democratize them. It must take as its fundamental pillar the preservation of the universal, democratic and intergovernmental nature of the Organization.

The delegation of Cuba considers that the report of the Secretary-General, complemented by the proposals from Member States upon consideration of the report, is an appropriate basis for advancing that process.

Our delegation believes that the new measures must aim at implementing the priorities of the Millennium Declaration, as well as the outcome of other, equally important United Nations summits and conferences. In our opinion, the proposals put forward must be complemented by other initiatives aimed at promoting other priorities agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration and at other conferences. Some such proposals are discussed in the report, while others, lacking implementation measures, are not. Such is the case of the priorities related to the search for peace, security and disarmament; development and the eradication of poverty; the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development; and attention to the special needs of Africa.

We hope that the reform measures will lead to progress in promoting and strengthening the structures and activities of the United Nations and its funds and programmes to promote economic and social development, which have unfortunately been weakened and whose ever-limited resources have been reduced or reallocated towards other goals in recent years.

The General Assembly must identify measures to improve the efficiency of management — such measures are within the competence of the Secretary-General — and must support the immediate implementation of those measures through the relevant mandates, decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly. The delegation of Cuba reiterates its confidence in the Secretary-General and wishes him success in this endeavour.

As was aptly suggested by the Secretary-General, it is the General Assembly's task to decide which issues are within its competence and which belong to the other principal and subsidiary organs. With respect to the intergovernmental process, it is also the Assembly's task to rapidly establish effective parameters for the careful study of proposals and for taking decisions on them without unnecessary delays. The strengthening of the Assembly should begin precisely with the effective and complete exercise of the powers belong to it and to its subsidiary organs in deciding on the reform proposals.

The new reform proposals reflect and deepen the varied measures some of which were outlined or considered in 1997 and which reflect a delicate balance. Some of them have been the subject of recent decisions of the General Assembly and other organs, while agreement could not be reached on others. In that last category are, among others, setting time limits on mandates by means of the budgetary process and the rationalization of intergovernmental consideration of programme and budgetary questions, the promotion of a universal presence and the strengthening of activities on the ground of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the integration of mechanisms for financing and planning operational activities, selectiveness in publishing reports and electronic access to documents. We believe that because of their implications, these questions require careful study by the Assembly and other relevant organs before decision is taken.

In our opinion, the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies must work carefully, together with the Secretary-General, to clarify and to decide on the scope and form of the implementation of some of the measures, whose overall appearance may appear attractive but whose real effects will depend on the interpretation given to them and the actual context in which they are implemented.

For example, the proposals for shortening the time period of the medium-term plan, for suppressing

the Committee for Programme and Coordination, for modifying and simplifying the budgetary process and for creating more flexibility for reallocating resources among programmes and expenditure items are all measures that, due to their complexity and technical nature, must necessarily be studied by the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

As well, it seems that there is an attempt to redefine the priorities of the United Nations through preparing the upcoming budget based on one interpretation of the Millennium Declaration, without taking into account other relevant mandates such as the outcomes of equally important summits and conferences. Our delegation believes that this process must maintain and reaffirm the validity and usefulness of principal instruments such as the medium-term plan and its revisions.

Another essential idea, in the view of the Cuban delegation, is that of universality in the approach of recommended actions, which must be implemented in their entirety, with a system-wide vision, by all organs or all Member States according to the specific case. For example, with respect to the scope and system-wide perspective of actions 2, 4 and 5, perhaps we all agree on the appropriateness mentioned in the report of strengthening the capacity of Member States in the area of human rights. However, doubts arise when that is related to strengthening of United Nations actions at the country level. And when those actions interact with operational activities for development and their corresponding funds and programmes, it seems that the implementation of such measures becomes limited to developing countries and does not extend to industrialized countries, where much remains to be done at the national level to ensure the universal enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, we should define more closely how the principle of consent would be applied in mixing actions of different natures when there are components of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights mixed with the offices and funds which are of a distinct and intergovernmental nature.

With regard to the integrated approach of these measures, the question arises of how to reconcile the proposed strengthening of the management and of the capacities of the High Commissioner's Office — which would appear to presuppose an increase of resources — with the goal entrusted to the Secretary-General of reviewing the management of this component of the Secretariat with a view to simplifying and rationalizing this machinery and its procedures within existing capacities and resources. It would be premature, for example, to take a position with regard to action 5 before the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services has been duly considered by the General Assembly.

The delegation of Cuba agrees with our President on the importance of the process of intergovernmental consideration of this report, that it be transparent and participative. Cuba repeats its readiness to participate in it dynamically, flexibly and constructively.

Mr. Kjørven (Norway): I am honoured to be speaking to the Assembly on such an important matter as strengthening the United Nations. The United Nations is a cornerstone of Norwegian foreign and development policy. Experience has taught us that the best way to promote peace and security, human rights and sustainable development is through multilateral cooperation. Effective multilateralism calls for a strong United Nations. Norway is therefore firmly committed to the efforts being undertaken by the Secretary-General to strengthen the United Nations.

Two years ago, the leaders of the world agreed on a common vision for the new century and a set of priorities to be achieved by 2015. It is of great concern to us that we are already falling behind in meeting these objectives, not least poverty reduction. It is also of concern to us that insufficient progress is being made in meeting the broader objectives of the Millennium Declaration in areas such as human rights, democracy, good governance, conflict resolution and the special needs of Africa. We need to heed the Secretary-General's warning that unless we make progress on a broader front, "the ringing words of the Declaration will serve only as grim reminders of the human needs neglected and promises unmet" (*A/57/270, para. 113*).

Our common objective is to make the United Nations a more effective multilateral instrument for pursuing the priorities set out in the Millennium Declaration. If we are to succeed in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, we must realize that we are all responsible for their implementation. This responsibility includes supporting and strengthening the United Nations capability to move the process forward.

Throughout his tenure, the Secretary-General has proven that he is committed to improving the United Nations. We see his proposals as a logical follow-up to the first reform process, started in 1997. We support the proposal to focus the Organization's attention on achieving the Millennium Development Goals and following up the recent world conferences.

Norway welcomes the emphasis in the report on the need to further strengthen the work on human rights within the United Nations, and we give this objective our full support. The promotion and protection of human rights worldwide are a fundamental task of this Organization. However, even though much progress has been made, a lot still remains to be done before we can truly say that human rights have been mainstreamed into the activities of the Organization. This includes areas such as humanitarian affairs, conflict prevention and peacekeeping. It is not enough to pay lip service to an abstract idea of full integration. We must continue to work on this, both in terms of our attitudes and in terms of our practical efforts. We are confident that the Secretary-General's proposed reforms will help us to achieve this aim.

Norway strongly supports the Secretary-General's emphasis on the importance of improving the coordination of United Nations activities at the country level. This should come as no surprise. These are ideas that have long been supported by Norway, and we think it is important that all United Nations activities are integrated, particularly in countries emerging from conflict.

We look forward to the completion of the implementation plan for the effective coordination among the various United Nations entities working in a given country by 2003. We see it as essential that that the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes working in each country are able to pool their resources and undertake joint programming. We welcome the proposed strengthening of the role and capacity of the Resident Coordinator, which in turn should facilitate such an enhanced effort to achieve a truly integrated United Nations country team.

However, successful coordination in the field must also include the major financial development institutions, mainly the IMF and the World Bank. There has been an increase in cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions in recent years as regards the development of national poverty reduction strategies. We strongly encourage and support the continuation and strengthening of this cooperation.

Public outreach is important for any organization, and no less so for the United Nations. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's proposals for strengthening the United Nations public information activities and believe that this will both enhance public support for the United Nations and further the Organization's legitimacy and authority as our foremost multilateral institution.

In recent years, the United Nations has also strengthened its relationship with civil society and the private sector, recognizing the need to work together to achieve our common goals. We are pleased that the Secretary-General's report includes proposals to strengthen and organize the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and the private sector.

Reform is not about doing more with less or saving money. It is about being able to live up to great expectations by being efficient and focused, and with resources sufficient to do the job. The people of the world look to the United Nations to help solve their problems. We are responsible for providing the United Nations with the capacity to do so.

Since 1997, the Secretary-General has successfully implemented reforms that were under his competence. However, we, the Member States, have not done our share. We must reform the way we work in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in order to strengthen the United Nations as a whole. We should all take note of the Secretary-General's proposals in this regard.

The United Nations can only be as strong and assertive as Governments make it. Norway is fully committed to giving its full support to the proposals set out in the Secretary-General's report. We look forward to seeing them put into operation in the revised programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. We urge all Member States to strongly endorse the Secretary-General's Reform Initiative.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.